

works. *Death Drop* does not have Zeke and Dieter learning deep life lessons so much as employing their inherent compassion and generosity to counter the ill effects of adult greed. A short novel, certainly, but containing a fast-paced story centered on protagonists whose integrity and intelligence is essential in a satisfying narrative resolution.

Thematic Links: Persephone Myth; Dante Gabriel Rossetti; Thrill Rides

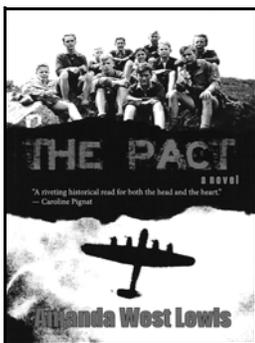
Karyn Heuenmann

LEWIS, Amanda West

The Pact

Red Deer Press, 2016. 240p. Gr. 7-12. 978-0-88995-544-8. Pbk. \$14.95

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In her book *The Pact*, Amanda West Lewis follows the life of Peter Gruber, a young German boy experiencing World War II. Because Peter is too young to be enlisted in the German military and fight on the front lines of the war, we are presented a character who must come to terms with the ideology of Nazism as a burgeoning youngster in the seemingly warm confines of his homeland. But as conditions in Germany worsen over the course of the war, Peter must adapt quickly as the Nazi falsehoods he was indoctrinated with become unravelled amidst senseless violence.

What is most interesting about *The Pact* is how Peter, the protagonist, exists on the margins of all the horror and atrocity that comes to represent the war. Of course Peter suffers some hardship in his ventures, but what is more crucial are his observations and thoughts as a witness to such events as the 1943 bombing of Hamburg, the Jewish transportation in Hungary, the Holocaust, and the Allied invasion. Peter's position as an offhand observer who never quite gets into the thick of things allows Lewis the privilege of covering a lot of ground in a broad and chronological manner. While at times the historical references may seem contrived, she manages to coalesce their significance to the characters and their settings very well. This makes the book a compelling work in both its fictional and historical sense.

Lewis is an excellent writer and does a fine job of pulling you into both the story and the main character. It is truly ingenious to pick a young boy experiencing first hand the harsh discipline that accompanied Nazi idealism. Peter's young mind is subverted for malicious reasons and as a fascinated reader that subversion is executed in a troubling but effective manner.

How Nazi propaganda affected the children of the German homeland becomes evident and concise, for we are sympathetic to an individual who literally grows into a Nazi, and cannot deconstruct the illusion that overwhelms his young mind. Lewis has managed to develop a truly brave piece of work.

Thematic Links: War; Military; Childhood Innocence; Friendships

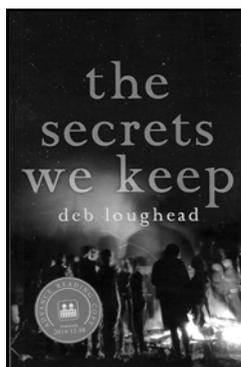
Zachary Chauvin

LOUGHEAD, Deb

The Secrets we Keep

Dundurn Press, 2016. 184p. Gr. 5-8. 978-1-4597-3729-7. Pbk. \$12.99

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Four teenagers attend a bush party at a quarry where a classmate tragically dies. Each one is conflicted over what they feel is their personal part in the tragedy. Guilt abounds and the victim's mother is seeking the truth of what really happened on that terrible spring night.

Told by "Clem" the story of what really happened finally unfolds. Revealed in Clementine's sixteen-year-old viewpoint, *The Secrets We Keep* is a story that begins strongly but truly ends with a whimper as the mystery is never really much of a secret to the reader. The overarching theme of the book is that all the key characters in the story have secrets they keep in order to protect themselves and those they love. Unfortunately for the reader, none of the secrets are particularly deep or dramatic.

One thing that the author demonstrates quite well is how social media is implicated in so much of today's responses to tragedy, and subsequently how that actually creates stress and isolation. This is certainly a timely idea given that every young person today (and their parents) are tethered to their devices 24/7.

Where the book fails or is weak is in overall character development. The four young people who are at the centre of the mystery are not fully fleshed out as people and tend to ricochet between teenage extremes. They don't make it as far as caricature but the story would be more engaging if we knew less obviously how each person ticked, particularly Ellie who is Clementine's best friend.

It also takes a while for the reader to figure out that the victim (Kit) was mentally challenged and why that was important to the mystery of what happened to him. Despite a too tidy conclusion, the book is a good read that is

more appropriate for the middle school crowd rather than high school aged readers.

Thematic Links: Mystery; Mentally Challenged Children

Anne Letain

MACDONALD, Hugh R.

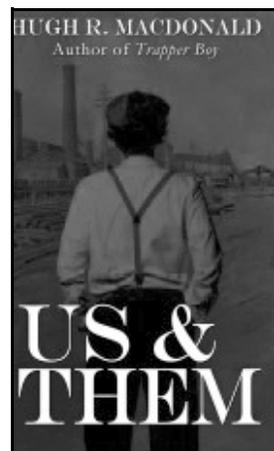
Us & Them

Cape Breton University Press, 2016. 188p. Gr. 7-9. 978-1-77206-065-2. Pbk. \$11.95

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Us & Them

continues the story of J. W. Donaldson from MacDonal's first book *Trapper Boy*. The J. W. is short for John Wallace that only his mother calls him. J. W. has matured into a young man of sixteen years, who lives in Sydney Mines in the late 1920s. Both books tell the story of the main character J.W. and his life growing up in a small coal mining community in Cape Breton. J. W. has had to discontinue his schooling so that he can work in the mines in order to help out with supporting the family. His daily chores, besides working in the mines, consist of collecting eggs and milk in the morning to bringing in coal and wood at night.



Coal mining has a strong presence in the history and culture on Cape Breton Island. Coal was first exploited by underground mining techniques in Cape Breton in 1720 with the first mine being found in Port Morien; the coal from this mine was destined for the Fortress of Louisbourg. But coal mining meant danger, hardship, and tragedies such as death. J. W. soon discovers how dangerous mining can be and he also learns that mining means something different to management; it is more about production than about the miners, many of who are boys and young men just like J.W. Enter a "hero" to the scene in the character of J. B. McLachlan. James Bryson McLachlan was a real person who was a miner, union leader, and radical but also the gentleman instrumental in leading a strike in 1923. It culminated over the years leading to the death of a miner named William Davis; the company police were responsible for his death on June 11, 1925. "Davis Day" is celebrated every year on this date in all mining communities on Cape Breton. J. W. enlists the help of J. B. McLachlan, learning that youth can bring